

# NH Army Guard hails outgoing commander

New chief takes over

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LORI DUFF / Monitor staff  
Brig. Gen. Stephen Burritt (center) watches his wife, Chris, and Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark pin stars to his uniform.

**T**he New Hampshire Army National Guard has a new leader. Retiring Brig. Gen. John Weeden handed command of the state's 1,650 citizen soldiers yesterday to former colonel Stephen Burritt, who was promoted to brigadier general during the ceremony.

Weeden has been in the military for 38 years, 31 with the National Guard. He took over command of the New Hampshire National Guard in 2001 and was honored yesterday for being a leader during one of the most critical times in the guard's history as the United States began the war on terror and the guard's role overseas grew.

"If there's been a time when the Army National Guard has responded to the call it's been during the five years" under Weeden's command, said Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark, the governor's military chief of staff.

In a longtime U.S. military tradition, Weeden passed the colors, a flag bearing a symbol of the New Hampshire Army National Guard, to Clark, who passed it on to Burritt.

Burritt has also served with the National Guard for more than 30 years. He spent the past four years as director of installation management and then as the New Hampshire Army National Guard's chief of staff. He managed the largest deployments since World War II and oversaw construction of the \$27.2 million Army Aviation Support facility on Regional Drive. He also directed the state's assistance to Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when 500 New Hampshire troops responded in less than 48 hours.

As Burritt took over yesterday, 150 soldiers with the 3643rd Security Force were on their way to Camp Shelby, Miss., to train for three months before deploying to Iraq.

He told the crowd gathered in the hangar: "I will give this assignment my all because I believe in what we do to protect our country and our state, and I believe in our citizen soldiers."

He said today's National Guard is not the one he joined decades ago. It is better equipped, better led and better trained, he said. But he wants to grow the New Hampshire Army National Guard to full capacity at 1,872 soldiers. To do that, he said leaders must ask how to better serve each soldier.

Weeden got choked up as he thanked his family and the soldiers for their support.

"I just want you to know I appreciate everything," he said. "I am who I am because of you. You're all very precious to me."

He and his wife plan to sell their Concord home and move in full time to their seasonal home on Lake Winnisquam. In his retirement, he said, he wants to volunteer more with his church and other groups and will spend time with his six young grandchildren. He said he looks forward to having time to "bounce them on my knee."

The generals' wives were presented with roses during the ceremony: red roses in full bloom for Karen Weeden to represent the commitment she has shown to the soldiers and yellow, budding roses for Chris Burritt, to symbolize her blossoming friendship with them.

The two generals were presented with awards and gifts. Burritt was given a flag that was flown over the Capitol in Washington in his honor. Burritt's mother; his son, Adam; and Chris Burritt helped attach his brigadier general epaulets.